

Attachment C

Data on Abandoned Newborns Los Angeles County 1999-2001



Report to the
SAFE HAVEN FOR ABANDONED BABIES TASK FORCE

May 29, 2002

Executive Summary

This report was produced to provide information to the Safe Haven for Abandoned Newborns Task Force created by the Children's Planning Council. The purpose of the report is to 1) identify data sources on abandoned infants and their mothers; 2) present results from a review of the data; and 3) provide recommendations on future data collection needs.

Four sources of data were identified and reviewed for this report: 1) national surveys; 2) international data: qualitative data on child abandonment from a historical and psychological perspective; 3) data on abandoned infants in Los Angeles County; and 4) local data on women who were considered "at-risk" for abandoning their infants.

The following observations were made:

- The number of abandoned infants in the various data sources reflects only those that are discovered, confounding the ability to truly estimate the number of discarded infants.
- While each incident of child abandonment is a tragedy, the evidence available at this time indicates that this is a comparatively rare event. A total of 14 abandoned babies were reported in Los Angeles County in 2001.
- The relatively low incidence of abandonment and the uniqueness of circumstances surrounding each event, make data collection a substantial challenge in this area. Lack of uniform data and adequate tracking mechanisms make it difficult to determine if the incidence of baby abandonment has increased over time.
- There is little evidence that the infant or parents involved in these cases fit any generalizable "profile." Infant abandonment has been reported among women of all reproductive ages, among all racial/ethnic groups and across educational levels including students and professionals.
- While these parents or infants do not appear to fit a distinctive "risk profile," some common characteristics do appear across many of these cases including:
 - Denial and/or concealment of the pregnancy.
 - Lack of a support system for the mother, the mother's fear of the "system," and fear of the pregnancy being discovered put her at risk for infant abandonment.
 - Contrary to the strong association between the mother's substance abuse and the phenomenon of boarder babies and infant abandonment in the national data, very few cases reviewed in Los Angeles County involved a substance abuse problem.
 - Mothers of abandoned infants did not receive pre-natal care services.

Recommendations for future data collection activities include:

- Provide a mechanism for uniformly tracking infant abandonment in Los Angeles County. Ideally this system should record data on all abandoned infants who are

safely surrendered under the law, those who survive, and those who die. Due to the small number of cases, information collection should be integrated within an existing information system, rather than develop a separate or new dedicated information system.

- Collect data on both women who abandon their infants and those at risk for abandonment. Policy decisions and widespread preventive efforts must be based on a clearer picture of where we currently are with regard to this problem.
- Strive to respectfully understand cultural differences, and the role culture may play in increasing the risk for infant abandonment, as well as serving to protect against it.
- Gathering the data is only the first step. Understanding how the data can be used to develop and assess appropriate interventions to decrease the likelihood that any other children will be discarded, will require a prolonged, collaborative and multidisciplinary effort.

Introduction

SB 1368 (Brulte), the Newborn Abandonment Law, became effective January 1, 2001. Under this law, hospitals throughout California are required to accept physical custody of newborn infants, up to 72 hours old, who are voluntarily surrendered by a parent or other person with legal custody. The intent of the law is to encourage parents who would otherwise abandon their babies in unsafe environments to leave their newborns in as safe a manner as possible. It allows the parent to surrender the baby anonymously. There is no criminal prosecution for the parents who leave their newborns in this manner. Hospitals must designate staff to receive such newborns and prepare policies, procedures and forms to implement the requirements of the law.

On February 6, 2002, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors requested the Children's Planning Council (CPC), in consultation with the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), the Commission of Children and Families, the Healthcare Association of Southern California, the Los Angeles County Children and Families First-Proposition 10 Commission, religious leaders, and other appropriate organizations, to submit recommendations on how to implement the Newborn Abandonment Law. A roster of the participants in the Safe Haven Task Force is listed in Attachment I. The Task Force was further instructed to develop recommendations that are focused on prevention strategies and work to achieve the goal of no baby ever being discarded in Los Angeles County.

On February 26, 2002, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors further requested that the Task Force include in the report: a) a list of existing related programs and recommendations on what role they should play; b) an analysis of what is known about women and girls who have abandoned or are considering abandonment of their newborns; and based on this knowledge, how to best reach them with programs to prevent abandonment and encourage prenatal care and safe delivery. In addition, the Board instructed the Director of Health Services, with the participation of the Directors of Mental Health and Children and Family Services, the District Attorney and ICAN to provide appropriate data and support to inform this analysis. As a result of this second Board motion, the Data Work Group of the Safe Haven Task Force was formed. Attachment II is a list of the participants in the Data Work Group. The Data Work Group met once on March 8, 2002 to discuss existing sources of data, methods for summarizing the data, and a timeline for producing this report.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- ⇒ Identify data sources on abandoned infants and their mothers
- ⇒ Present results from a review of the data
- ⇒ Provide recommendations on future data collection needs

Data Sources

Four sources of data were identified for this report: 1) national surveys; 2) international data: qualitative data on child abandonment from a historical and psychological perspective; 3) data on abandoned infants in Los Angeles County; and 4) local data on women who were considered “at-risk” for abandoning their infants.

National Surveys

Four national data surveys were reviewed. Table 1-Summary of National Surveys on Child Abandonment, provides a summary of these surveys, including information on the source, methods, cases, and major recommendations. These surveys referred to three different types of abandoned infants:

Boarder babies: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who remain in the hospital beyond the date of medical discharge. They may be eventually claimed by their families or abandoned and/or placed in alternative care.

Abandoned infants: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who have not yet been medically discharged but who are unlikely to leave the hospital in the custody of their biological parent(s). This includes infants whose parents are unwilling or unable to provide care and/or whom the child welfare agency determines cannot safely remain in the care of their biological parent(s).

Discarded infants: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who were found in a public place or other inappropriate place without anyone’s care or supervision; and were a live birth or were found deceased and the cause of death appeared to be related to abandonment.

1. Expediting Permanency for Abandoned infants: Guidelines for State Policies and Procedures¹

This survey was a collaborative effort among three National Resource Centers, the National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center, the National Resource Center on Foster Care & Permanency Planning and the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues. For the purpose of the report, the committee defined abandonment as:

“willful intent by words, actions or omissions not to return for a child, or failure to maintain a significant parental relationship with a child through visitation or communication in which incidental or token visits or communication are not considered significant.”

Included in this definition were the less frequent cases of “discarded” infants.

Table I - Summary of National Surveys on Child Abandonment*

<u>Survey Source</u>	<u>Methods</u>	<u>Cases (n)</u>	<u>Major Findings/Recommendations/Limitations</u>																					
Expediting Permanency for Abandoned Infants: Guidelines for State Policies and Procedures (1998) ¹	Taskforce comprised of representatives from three National Resource Centers: The National Abandoned Infants Assistance, The National Resource Center on Foster Care and Permanency Planning and the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues at the American bar Association Center on Children and the Law	1998 = 150	<p>There was an increase in the number of babies being abandoned in hospitals, often due to cocaine or other drug use</p> <p>In the past couple of years, there has been an increased focus on the highly publicized though infrequent cases of “discarded” infants where the parent’s identity or whereabouts is unknown. In 1998, the actual number of cases was estimated at 150 nationwide</p>																					
Child Welfare League of America - Infant Abandonment Survey (Data gathered from 1997 to 2000) ²	Survey sent to public child welfare and law enforcement agencies in each of the 50 states; however, 73% of the surveys were not returned. The results reported are limited to those from the 27 responding child welfare agencies	1997= 33 1998= 32 1999= 29 2000= 24	<p>The average number of baby abandonment instances in which the mother was identified by age:</p> <table><tr><th colspan="4">Age Group</th></tr><tr><th>16-19</th><th>20-25</th><th>25-30</th><th>30-40</th></tr><tr><td>32</td><td>72</td><td>32</td><td>39</td></tr></table> <p>The average number of baby abandonment instances in which the mother was identified by race/ethnicity for mothers was:</p> <table><tr><th colspan="3">Race/Ethnicity</th></tr><tr><th>African Americans</th><th>Whites</th><th>Hispanic/Latino</th></tr><tr><td>102</td><td>62</td><td>22</td></tr></table>	Age Group				16-19	20-25	25-30	30-40	32	72	32	39	Race/Ethnicity			African Americans	Whites	Hispanic/Latino	102	62	22
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Report to the Congress: Effective Care Methods for Responding to the Needs of Abandoned Infants and Young Children Prepared by the National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center (Data gathered in May 1992) ³	Descriptive data collected by the projects were consolidated and in-depth telephone interviews exploring effective practices were conducted with program staff.	2,293 infants/ children 1,923 adults contacted	<p>The predominant ethnic or racial group of mothers served was African American (59%)</p> <p>The mean age of the mothers was 27 years with a range of 21 to 34 years</p> <p>Nearly one out of every ten mothers served was either homeless (9%) or incarcerated (1%). An additional 3 percent were in residential drug treatment programs. Almost two thirds (62%) of the mothers were receiving AFDC at the time of program intake.</p>																					

Table I Summary of National Surveys on Child Abandonment* (cont.)

<u>Survey Source</u>	<u>Methods</u>	<u>Cases (n)</u>	<u>Major Findings/Recommendations/Limitations</u>
1998 National Estimates of the Number of Boarder Babies, Abandoned Infants, and Discarded Infants ⁴	The study estimates the number of boarder babies nationwide. A similar study was conducted in 1991. Both studies asked State child welfare agencies to identify jurisdictions that might have had boarder babies. Discarded infants were identified through a Lexis-Nexis news database search. Some cases garnered considerable attention and as such, attention was paid to avoid duplicating counts.	1992 = 65 ** 1997 = 105**	<p>The median of the reported mean annual income for the AIA families was \$6,897</p> <p>Almost half (48%) of the pregnant AIA clients received either late (second or third trimester) or no prenatal care. The majority (64%) exhibited evidence of drug or alcohol use during pregnancy. One-quarter of the target infants were born prematurely.</p> <p>64% of the biological mothers were identified as current crack/cocaine users. Alcohol is the second most frequently reported drug of choice (38%). Most of the clients (80%) were reported as using more than one substance.</p> <p>Although the numbers of discarded infants rose 62% from 1992 to 1997, they represent less than one percent of either the boarder baby or abandoned infant populations identified in the 1998 study</p> <p>Nationwide, in 1992, 57 discarded infants were found alive while 8 infants were found dead. In 1997, 72 abandoned infants were found alive while 33 were found dead.</p> <p>For each discarded infant identified in 1997, there were 128 boarder babies and 166 abandoned infants</p>

* Baby abandonment cases are categorized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau as:

Boarder babies: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who remain in the hospital beyond the date of medical discharge. They may be eventually claimed by their families or abandoned and/or placed in alternative care.

Abandoned infants: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who have not yet been medically discharged but who are unlikely to leave the hospital in the custody of their biological parent(s). This includes infants whose parents are unwilling or unable to provide care and/or who the child welfare agency determines cannot safely remain in the care of their biological parent(s)

Discarded infants: Infants, under the age of 12 months, who were found in a public place or other inappropriate place without anyone's care or supervision; and were a live birth or were found deceased and the cause of death appeared to be related to abandonment.

**Lexis-Nexis news database

The report found that:

- Beginning in the early 80's, there was an increase in the number of babies being abandoned in hospitals, often due to cocaine or other drug use.
- More recently there has been an increased focus on the highly publicized though infrequent cases of "discarded" infants where the parent's identity or whereabouts is unknown. In 1998, the actual number of cases was estimated at 150 nationwide.

2. Child Welfare League of America Infant Abandonment Survey²

The Child Welfare League of America Infant Abandonment Survey defined baby abandonment as:

"discarding or leaving alone for an extended period of time an infant under the age of 12 months in a public or private setting with the intent to relinquish care of, or responsibility for, the infant."

The survey was sent to public child welfare and law enforcement agencies for the years 1997 to 2000. The survey results showed that:

- The response rate was low, only 27%, 12 out of 94 surveys mailed nationwide to law enforcement were returned. Only 27 out of 50 surveys mailed to state child welfare agencies were returned.
- The average number of abandoned infants less than 12 months old found per year was 33 in 1997, 32 in 1998, 29 in 1999 and 24 in 2000.
- Only 13 of the 27 states that responded collected information on infant abandonment. Of those that did collect information, 82% collected it through telephone or written surveys, while the remainder used manual counts. No states were using automated systems.
- This study indicated that where the mother was identified, there was an over-representation of African American mothers and an over-representation of the 20-25 age group.
- The findings for this study need to be reviewed cautiously given the limited number of responses. The results may be more indicative of the states that responded rather than any national trend.

3. Report to the Congress: Effective Care Methods for Responding to the Needs of Abandoned Infants and Young Children³

This report summarized data from 24 comprehensive service demonstration projects providing services to boarder babies and abandoned infants.

- The predominant ethnic or racial group of mothers served was African-American (59%). The mean age of the mothers was 27 years with a range of 21 to 34 years. The average age of the target child was 6.5 months.
- Nearly one out of every ten mothers served was either homeless (9%) or incarcerated (1%). 3% were in residential drug treatment programs. Half were living with family or friends.
- Almost two thirds (62%) of the mothers were receiving AFDC at the time of program intake. The median of the reported mean annual income for the Abandoned Infants Assistance (AIA) families was \$6,897.
- Almost half (48%) of the pregnant AIA clients received either late (second or third trimester) or no prenatal care. The majority (64%) exhibited evidence of drug or alcohol use during pregnancy. One-quarter of the target infants were born prematurely.
- 64% of the biological mothers were identified as current crack/cocaine users. 38% reported alcohol use. Most of the clients (80%) were reported as using more than one substance.

4. 1998 National Estimates of the Number of Boarder Babies, Abandoned Infants and Discarded Infants⁴

This study was done in 1998, comparing data from 1992 to 1997, on boarder babies, abandoned and discarded infants. In order to understand the extent of the boarder baby and abandoned infant phenomenon, child welfare agencies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia were asked to identify any counties or cities in their state that were experiencing a boarder baby or abandoned infant problem. Discarded babies were identified through a Lexis-Nexis database search for the periods of November 12, 1991 to November 11, 1992, and November 12, 1996 to November 11, 1997.

- Although the number of discarded infants rose 62% from 1991 to 1998, it is still a very rare event. Discarded infants make up less than one percent of either the boarder baby or abandoned infant populations identified in 1998.
- Nationwide, in 1992, 57 discarded infants were found alive while 8 infants were found dead. In 1997, 72 discarded infants were found alive while 33 were found dead.
- For each discarded infant identified in 1997, there were 128 boarder babies and 166 abandoned infants.

Discussion of National Surveys:

It is difficult to determine how many babies are discarded each year in the United States. The review of these four surveys suggests that the discarded infant population is small.

The surveys were limited in scope and the numbers reported in each survey were very small. In most cases, due to the small numbers, the results cannot be interpreted as reflecting national statistics. The results are at best descriptive. The Federal government does not have a formal data gathering process for specific information on infant abandonment, and states are not uniformly collecting and maintaining data⁵. This makes it difficult to determine trends. In addition, it is highly likely that many discarded infants are never found. While we are more likely to know the true figure on boarder babies and abandoned babies, the true figure for discarded infants is difficult to estimate.

International Data - Qualitative Perspective

An extensive Medline search was done to identify other data sources or articles that could provide qualitative data on infant abandonment. As a result, two international studies were reviewed. The first study was done in Belgium (Burnstein)⁶ in 1972, on social aspects of physical infant abandonment. The study categorized three types of abandoning mothers:

- 1) Mother found herself pregnant and is left by the father
- 2) Mothers who have difficulty accepting responsibility
- 3) Married women who abandon their babies born from extramarital affairs

The second study was done in France (Bonnet 1993)⁷ and used psychoanalytic methods to conduct multiple interviews with 22 women. The interviews took place after the woman had discovered her pregnancy and that it was too late to have an abortion, or immediately post-partum. The participants ranged in age from under 18 years to over 35 years of age. Marital status among the women varied according to age; 13 were single and living with their parents, 6 were married or living with someone, 2 were divorced. Sixteen of the participants had never been pregnant before, 6 already had other children. Professional status was also a function of age; 11 were high school or college students, and 11 were professionals from all walks of life. The study noted that in France infant abandonment is rarely motivated by economic hardship.

The French study further described and documented the psychological factors involved in infant abandonment. Most women were in denial of their pregnancy. Among the women who had not been pregnant before, there was denial of their procreative potential. Among the women who already had children, their emotional state regarding this pregnancy had to do more with a change in their relationship with their partner. Fantasies of violence towards the unborn child were manifested by most of the women. These fantasies of wanting to damage or kill the fetus lead to guilt and isolation of the mother. A few of the pregnancies resulted from sexual abuse by a close relative or rape by a stranger. In these cases the need to conceal their pregnancy was even more intense. Most of the women did not seek prenatal care because of their fear of admitting they were pregnant. Labor took them by surprise and they often arrived at the hospitals to deliver in a state of emergency. Two of the women were in such extreme denial that the labor and delivery took them by surprise, and they did not recognize the newborn as a baby. These cases both resulted in infanticide.

Lastly, this study concludes with the following recommendations to professionals who may deal with women at risk for abandonment:

- Receive and listen to a distressed pregnant woman without passing judgement.
- Multidisciplinary assistance should be provided to women who have abandoned their babies or are at risk for abandonment, including a psychosocial, medical and legal help.

Los Angeles County Data

In order to review local data on infants abandoned in Los Angeles County, the following definition was used:

Babies less than 72 hours old, who were found in a public place or other inappropriate place, without anyone's care or supervision; and were a live birth or were found deceased, where the cause of death appeared to be related to abandonment.

Two agencies were consulted to obtain information on abandoned babies in Los Angeles County: the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). A third agency, Project Cuddle, Inc., a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization based in Orange County, provided data on women at-risk for infant abandonment, from Los Angeles County, who called their 24-hour help-line. Demographic and other data were reviewed for both data sets separately. Key highlights in the data are summarized below.

1. Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN)

ICAN obtains data on abandoned infants from the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office. The Coroner's Office provides ICAN with information on deaths of all children (age 17 and under) with which it has been involved. The Coroner is involved with all suspicious or violent deaths and those in which a physician did not see the decedent in the 20 days prior to the death. The Coroner's office is also involved with deaths for which a doctor refuses to sign a death certificate.

ICAN screened data received from the Coroner for the period January 1999 through February 2002 and identified twenty-two cases of abandoned newborn fatalities. One of the cases for 2001 included a five-day old infant. While this does not fit the definition of babies less than 72 hours old, it was still included, because of the profile of the mother. For all the ICAN cases, more detailed Coroner reports were obtained and reviewed to gather information specifically useful to the Task Force, and, in many cases, supplemental calls to law enforcement and/or the District Attorney's Office were made. In addition, for those cases that had been reviewed by ICAN's Child Death Review Team, information provided by Team members (e.g., Coroner, law enforcement, Department of Health Services, District Attorney) was incorporated. Finally, Pam Booth of the District Attorney's Office reviewed the data ICAN had compiled and provided additional case-specific information from District Attorney or Court records.

2. Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

While ICAN captures data on the infants who are abandoned and die, DCFS captures data on infants who are abandoned and survive. Infant abandonment is captured through the serious incident review process. When an infant is abandoned or safely surrendered, a serious incident report is made. These reports are kept manually. Data were only available for 2001. Due to classification differences in the serious incident reports, no data from prior years could be obtained. The cases identified were cross-checked with the ICAN data to avoid duplicate counting. This resulted in an additional 3 cases submitted for review for 2001.

Table 2 presents annual infant abandonment cases from DCFS and ICAN since 1997:

**Table 2 Abandoned Infant Data 1997-2002
Los Angeles County**

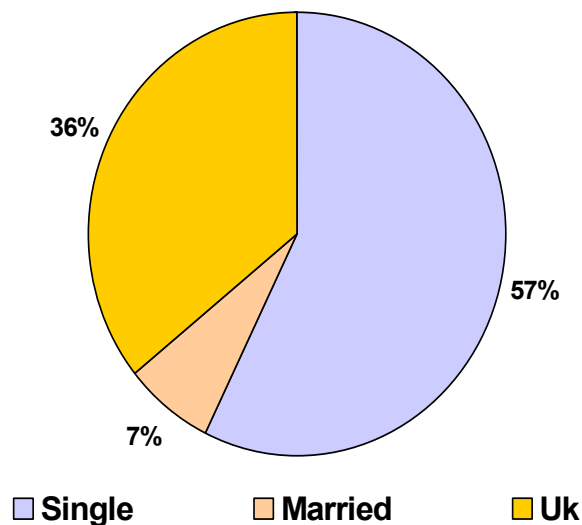
Program	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
ICAN	--	--	6	3	11	2
DCFS	--	--	--	--	3	--

Discussion of Data on Abandoned Infants in Los Angeles County

While data were available from the ICAN dataset for 1999-2002, the data from DCFS were only for 2001. This limited our ability to look at a change in the numbers of infants who were discarded and retrieved in Los Angeles County across more than one year. A total of 14 cases of infants who were abandoned (ICAN-DCFS) in Los Angeles County in 2001 were reviewed. The identity of the mother was unknown on 4 of the 14 cases (29%). Data regarding these 14 cases is summarized in Table 3 (pg. 11).

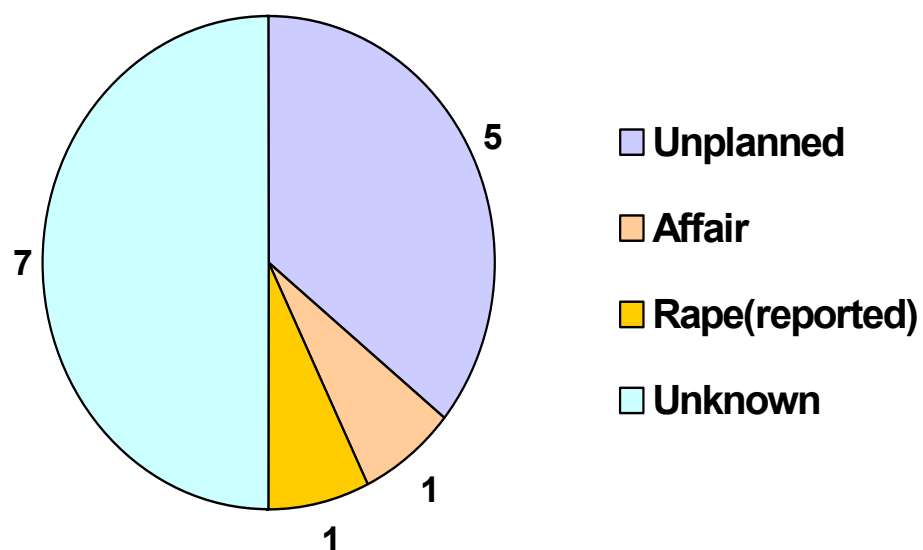
- The age range for the mothers was 14 to 28 years. The mean was 22.1 years.
- Among the cases where the race/ethnicity of the mother was known, 6 were Hispanic, 2 were white, and one was African-American.
- The majority of women were single (Figure 1 – Marital Status).
- 6 (43%) of the women had another child.
- The more commonly observed family living structures were: 1) living with parents; 2) living with the father of the baby, and; 3) living with another relative.
- One of the mothers was employed in a professional occupation, 4 were students employed in other fields, 2 were students and one was unemployed.
- In 5 of 7 cases the pregnancies were unplanned (Figure 2 – Pregnancy Factors). Other factors impacting the woman's pregnancy included having an affair and rape.
- Pregnancy concealment, or keeping the pregnancy a secret, was confirmed in all 9 of the cases where the identity of the mother was known. In the 5 pregnancies where the reason for concealing the pregnancy was known, being "afraid of family/mother," "not wanting another baby," and "couldn't care for another child," were the reasons reported to explain concealment of the pregnancy.
- In 3 of the cases the mothers either admitted, or were known to have, a substance abuse problem.

- Only one of the three identified respondents for whom information was available reported having knowledge of the Safe Haven Law.



Data Source: Department of Children and Family Services, 2001
Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2001

**Figure 2 Pregnancy Factors
Los Angeles County 2001**



Data Source: Department of Children and Family Services, 2001
Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2001

Table 3 – Data on Abandoned Infants, Los Angeles County, 2001

Abandoned Infants (N=14)								
Maternal Characteristics								
Age Range:	14-28	Mean Age (in years)		22.1				
Race:	#	%	Marital	#	%	Employed	#	%
African American	1	7.1	Single	8	57.1	Yes -	1	7.1
Hispanic	6	42.9	Married	1	7.1	Yes - Other	4	28.6
White	2	14.3	Unknown	5	35.7	Student	2	14.3
Unknown	5	35.7				Unemployed	1	7.1
						Unknown	6	42.9
Family Structure:	#	%	Father's Involvement		#	%		
Living w/ parents	7	50.0	None		3	21.4		
Living with Husband & child	1	7.1	Some/Minimal		1	7.1		
Living w/ other relative	1	7.1	Married/Living together		1	7.1		
Unknown	5	35.7	Unknown		9	64.3		
Other children?	#	%	Pregnancy	#	%	Denial of	#	%
Yes	6	42.9	Unplanned	5	35.7	Yes	0	0.0
No	3	21.4	Affair	1	7.1	No	8	57.1
Unknown	5	35.7	Rape	1	7.1	Unknown	6	42.9
			Unknown	7	50.0			
Concealment	#	%	Reason for Concealment:			Substance	#	%
Yes	9	64.3	Afraid of Family/Mom	3	21.4	Yes	3	21.4
			Don't want another baby	1	7.1	No	6	42.9
			Couldn't care for child	1	7.1	Unknown	5	35.7
			Unknown	9	64.3			
No	0	0.0						
Unknown	5	35.7						
Domestic Violence:	#	%	Knowledge of Safe Haven Law?	#	%	Infant Status	#	%
Yes	0	0.0	Yes	1	7.1	Alive	3	21.4
No	7	50.0	No	2	14.3	Deceased	11	78.6
Unknown	7	50.0	Unknown	11	78.6			
Case outcome	#	%						
Adoption	3	21.4						
Murder Charges	7	50.0						
Mother unidentified	4	28.6						

3. Project Cuddle, Inc.

Project Cuddle, Inc., a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization based in Orange County, provides a 24-hour toll-free crisis hotline to assist women nationwide at risk for abandoning their babies. Since July of 1996, Project Cuddle has rescued 380 babies from abandonment. Table 4 presents a summary by year of the thirty-six cases that were reported for Los Angeles County from 1997 to 2002.

**Table 4 Project Cuddle Data
Los Angeles County 1997-2001**

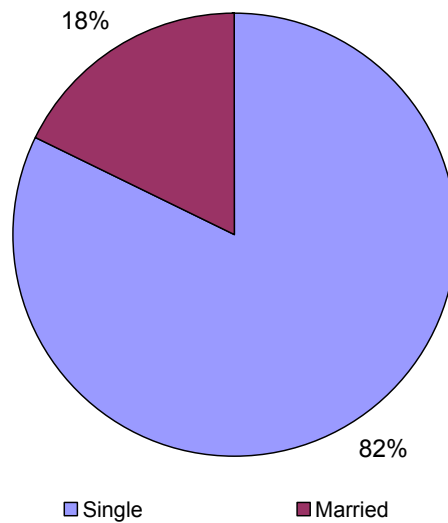
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cases	1	6	10	8	10	1

Discussion of Project Cuddle Data for Los Angeles County

The Project Cuddle data were reviewed for 1999 through 2001. A total of 28 cases were reviewed (Table 5, pg. 14). The Project Cuddle data is a select sample. It represents women who knew about the existence of Project Cuddle and were willing to seek assistance from a telephone hotline. It should not be construed as a representative sample of women who are likely to abandon their babies.

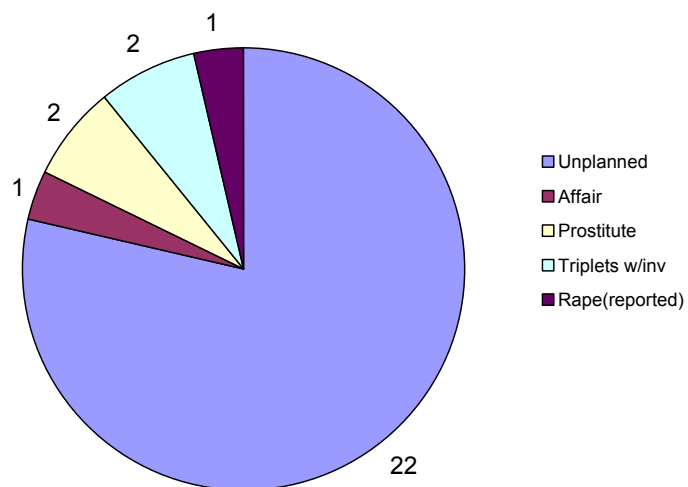
- The age range for the Project Cuddle mothers was 15 to 38 years.
- 6 of the cases were Hispanic, 4 were African American, 4 were White, 2 were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10 were mixed race or other.
- The majority of women (82%) were single (Figure 3- Marital Status).
- 13 cases (46%) had other children living with them.
- The more commonly observed family living structures were 1) living alone; 2) living with parents, and 3) living with the father of the baby.
- In 22 (79%) of the Project Cuddle cases, the pregnancies were unplanned (Figure 4 – Pregnancy Factors). Two respondents stated that they had become pregnant through prostitution.
- 19 out of 28 (68%) of the Project Cuddle cases reflected an attempt to conceal their pregnancies. Fear of the “system” and “being afraid of family/mother” were the two primary reasons reported to explain concealment of their pregnancies.
- In 5 of the 28 (18%) Project Cuddle cases the mothers either admitted or were known to have a substance abuse problem.
- 5 out of 28 (18%) Project Cuddle cases reported domestic violence. The relatively small number of women who reported domestic violence may be due to the essential lack of involvement of respondents with the fathers. Furthermore, mothers may not have reported domestic violence even in its presence. Partners of Project Cuddle women were either uninvolved, had waived their rights, or were under restraining order.
- Beginning in 2001, awareness of the Safe Haven Legislation by the respondents in the Project Cuddle data was 80% (8 out of 10).

Figure3 Marital Status
Los Angeles County 1999-2001



Data Source: Project Cuddle, Inc., 1999-2001

Figure 4 Pregnancy Status
Los Angeles County 1999-2001



Data Source: Project Cuddle, Inc., 1999-2001

Table 5 - Los Angeles County, 1999- 2001

Pregnant Women requesting assistance from Project Cuddle (N=28)

Maternal Characteristics														
Age Range:		15-38		Mean Age (in years)				23.5						
Race:	#	%		Marital Status:		#		%		Employed	#	%		
African American	4	14.3		Single		23		82.1		Yes	8	28.6		
Hispanic	6	21.4		Married		5		17.9		No	18	64.3		
White	4	14.3								Prostitution	2	7.1		
Asian	2	7.1												
Other/Mixed	12	42.9												
Family Structure:			#		%		Father's Involvement			#		%		
Living w/ parents			5		17.9		None			24		85.7		
Living w/father of baby			4		14.3		Signed off rights			3		10.7		
Living with Husband & child			1		3.6		Restraining Order			1		3.6		
Living alone			6		21.4									
Self & Child			2		7.1									
Homeless/Living in Car			3		10.7									
Other			7		25.0									
Other children?	#	%		Pregnancy Factors:		#		%		Denial of Pregnancy		#	%	
Yes	13	46.4		Unplanned		22		78.6		Yes		8	28.6	
No	15	53.6		Prostitute		2		7.1		No		20	71.4	
				Rape (reported)		1		3.6						
				Other		3		10.7						
Concealment of Pregnancy		#		%										
Yes		19		67.9		Reason for Concealment			#		%			
						Afraid of System			8		28.6			
						Afraid of Family/Mom			7		25.0			
						Parents Abandoned			2		7.1			
						Abusive Husband			1		3.6			
						Only wants son			2		7.1			
						Mentally unstable			2		7.1			
						Other			6		21.4			
No		9		32.1										
Substance Abuse	#	%		Domestic Violence:		#		%		Knowledge of Safe Haven Law?		#	%	
Yes	5	17.9		Yes		5		17.9		Yes		8	28.6	
No	23	82.1		No		23		82.1		No		2	7.1	
								Not asked prior to 2001		18		64.3		
										Foster care		2		
										Guardian ship		1		
												3.6		

Table 6 provides a breakdown of the data describing how women found out about the existence of the Project Cuddle Hotline. Television was the most common source. Debbe Magnusen, founder and Executive Director of Project Cuddle, has appeared on daytime television shows such as Ricki Lake, Geraldo, Montel Williams, The View, Liza, The Oprah Winfrey Show and others. Other information referral sources included friends, counselors, pastors, board members and obstetricians

**Table 6 Project Cuddle Reference Source Data
Los Angeles County 1997-2002**

Reference source	Total	Percent
Television	17	48.6%
Personal referrals*	12	34.3%
Written advertisements**	5	14.3%
Other pregnancy intervention agency	1	2.8%

*Friends, counselors, pastor, Board member, relative, obstetrician

**Phone book, flyer, newspaper

Summary

In summary, infant abandonment in Los Angeles County, as in the nation, is a rare occurrence. Longitudinal data are insufficient to determine trends in Los Angeles County or to conclude whether the incidence is increasing since passage of the Safe Haven Law. Similarly, numbers of cases in any one-year are insufficient to draw significant conclusions or to generalize results to the County's population. In addition, little is known about parents who abandon or discard their babies.

The following can be observed from international, national and local data regarding infant abandonment:

- The number of discarded infants in the various data sources reflect only those who are discovered, confounding the ability to truly estimate the number of discarded infants.
- The overall rarity of events of abandonment and the unique characteristics of each event make it difficult to identify patterns in the available data.
- Lack of uniform data and adequate tracking mechanisms make it difficult to determine if the incidence of baby abandonment has increased over time.
- There is little evidence that the infants or parents involved in these cases fit any generalizable "profile." Infant abandonment has been reported among women of all reproductive ages, among all racial/ethnic groups and all socio-economic groups,.,.
- While these parents or infants do not appear to fit a distinctive "risk profile," some common characteristics do appear across many of these cases including:
 - Denial and/or concealment of the pregnancy.
 - Lack of a support system for the mother, fear of the "system," and fear of the pregnancy being discovered put the woman at risk for infant abandonment.

- Contrary to the strong association of the mother's substance abuse and the phenomenon of boarder babies and infant abandonment in the national data, very few cases reviewed in Los Angeles County had a substance abuse problem.
- Mothers of abandoned infants did not receive pre-natal care services.

Recommendations for future data collection

The unique circumstances surrounding each incidence of infant abandonment and the relative rarity of these events will make consistent data collection an on-going challenge. The lack of a system to capture data on infant abandonment makes it difficult to determine whether efforts directed at prevention are having an effect. The California State Department of Public Social Services has outlined steps for all counties to take to record data on infants who are safely surrendered in the CWS/CMS computer system. While this may provide one mechanism for uniformly tracking infant abandonment in California, the small number of cases would seem to dictate that information collection should be integrated within the existing CWS/CMS system, rather than develop a separate or new dedicated information system.

Our data on abandoned infants that represent multiple Los Angeles County sources are available for only one year, 2001. Therefore we cannot determine whether the phenomenon of infant abandonment is increasing. Future data should be collected both on women who abandon their infants and those at risk for abandonment. Policy decisions and widespread preventive efforts must be based on a clearer picture of where we currently are with regard to this problem. Similarly, without a better and more uniform data collection system, these efforts cannot be evaluated for their effectiveness.

Due to the rarity of these events, the unique circumstances of each event and the paucity of available data, it was not possible to examine cultural factors that could likely have an impact on infant abandonment. For preventive strategies to be effective, cultural norms and practices need to be reviewed and recognized. Future data collection should strive to respectfully understand cultural differences, and the role culture may play in increasing the risk for infant abandonment, as well as serving to protect against it.

However, any effort to improve data collection on infant abandonment must acknowledge the limitations inherent in trying to understand such rare and complex social phenomena, and must be designed to accommodate the challenges of confronting these complex sets of circumstances. In order to eliminate infant abandonment, policy makers, program managers and others, must recognize that emphasis will have to be on broadly targeted preventive services and educational efforts rather than narrowly targeted efforts on any defined population.

The Data Work Group of the Safe Haven for Abandoned Newborns Task Force brought together a multi-disciplinary team to review the data on infant abandonment. Representatives included staff from the Department of Health Services, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, the District Attorney's Office, and Project Cuddle. A dialogue was initiated to elucidate the

gaps and challenges that must be addressed in collecting and analyzing data on infant abandonment. Gathering the data is only the first step. Understanding how the data can be used to develop and assess appropriate interventions, to decrease the likelihood that any other children will be discarded, will require a prolonged, collaborative and multidisciplinary effort.

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